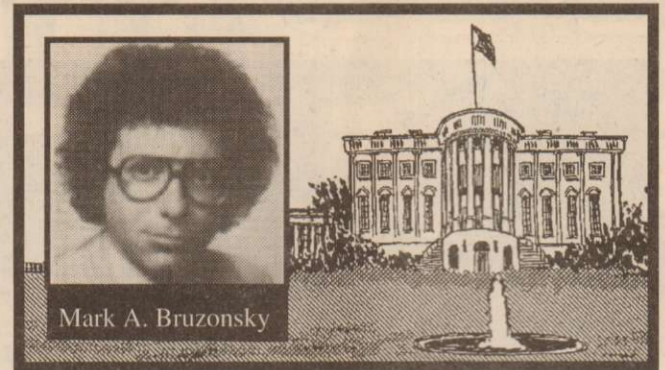


Will the Arab side this time, as so often in the past, find itself as politically outclassed and outmanoeuvred as has been the case on the military battlefield for many generations now? If the answer proves to be negative -- most likely unfortunately -- then the dangers of a Camp David II situation are not just for the Palestinians

From



Washington

Palestinians must remain

THE Palestinians face a great historic moment; a great historic challenge; yet maybe greatest of all is the historic danger.

Ahead could be a disastrous Camp David II that might be the final death-knell of the Palestinian nationalist quest.

Or ahead could be a process that might, just possibly might, result in some process ending up in Palestinian statehood.

And yet, of course, the past must absolutely be teacher and guide as the jockeying for starting positions in this new round of historic Arab-Israeli negotiations looms. For anyone who attempts to engage successfully in this new round who isn't guided by the past record of deception and political chicanery by both the West and the Israelis is sure to fail.

Still, squarely facing current political realities it is crucial as well.

Let there be no mistake in interpreting this analyst's considered views at this point:

The Palestinian nationalist movement seems to me in far greater danger of liquidation in the form we have known it for a generation than of fruitful accomplishment of its historic quest. The news headlines propounding hope in the so-called "peace process" are still far more manipulated by the American empire and the Israeli-Zionist movement than by any others.

Furthermore, the US-Israeli alliance -- especially under the changed historic circumstances brought about by the collapse of the Soviet balance to America of the influence in world affairs as well as what has essentially become an Arab civil war in the region -- might well

**THE PALESTINIANS
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Muhammad Hallaj
Palestinian writer

prove overwhelming.

The Arab World, heretofore either on the Palestinian side or at the least afraid to cross the Palestinians, is today so divided, confused, and misled that the Palestinians are practically alone in their struggle to create a true Palestinian state in the areas of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem.

This much clearly said -- least there be any misunderstandings where this analyst is coming from in overall perspective -- the current political moment probably cannot and should not be avoided even in view of these historic dangers. Everyone is going to get sucked in one way or another to today's diplomatic dance. Those who try to remain aloof -- as some Palestinian, leftist intellectuals, and Islamist forces understandably prefer -- may end up finding them-

selves being pushed even further to the historic sidelines.

It is a time of political engagement. One way or another, those who want to be involved have to find a role and stimulate some kind of diplomat process ... even while still preparing for possible future warfare. Indeed, even should it come to another war -- and readying of the bomb shelters in Tel Aviv has recently been in the news again -- today's diplomatic-political manoeuvres will also help determine such a new war's outcome.

The biggest question of all is how this diplomatic-political game is going to be played by the various parties.

In short, and to be very candidly blunt, will the Arab side this time, as so often in the past, find itself as politically outclassed and outmanoeuvred as has been the case on the

military battlefield for many generations now?

Asked another way, very simply, are the various Arab parties, divided and confused as they are, going to be able to conduct themselves at the negotiating table any better than they have on the battlefields when pitted against the Israelis and the Americans?

One has to be sceptical of course that the answer to these basic questions is a positive one. And yet, there are a lot of changes going on.

If the answer proves to be negative -- most likely unfortunately -- then the dangers of a Camp David II situation are not just for the Palestinians.

A false and deceptive peace arrangement like what has happened before, or a new separate peace this time with Syria backed by Egypt and others, will undoubtedly unleash forces within Arab politics that will have unpredictable results in the years ahead.

While the Americans, still essentially working with the Israelis and the American Jewish establishment no matter what images are portrayed to the press, may well be able to manipulate another political arrangement that further di-

vides and polarises the Arabs -- buying themselves and Israeli client state still more time to consolidate its hold on Palestinian territories. But the question will always nag at the peripheries of such agreements how long will the Americans be able to keep the Arab World Balkanised and at odds with itself?

As Palestinian writer Muhammad Hallaj put it in a recent column, "Even if (the Palestinians) choose to surrender to overwhelming odds, if they choose to accept being diminished in order to survive, will a future born out of duress and coercion have any moral weight? Will future generations of Palestinians and other Arabs who will be equally diminished by their loss, owe obedience to an iniquitous world order?"

But if -- however unlikely -- what is being planned under the table by some parties is indeed a historic settlement than somehow the powerful Israeli Rightwing which has come to dominant Israeli political life is going to have to be overcome, along with their allies in the US.

And no one really seems to think this is likely.

**FIRM
but
WILLING**